



DPI VISTA Monthly

July 2009

The purpose of life is not to be happy - but to *matter*, to be productive, to be useful, to have it make some difference that you have lived at all.

-Leo Rosten

Jane Grinde
Project Director
Betsy Prueter
Project Coordinator
Ruth Anne Landsverk
Family Education Coordinator
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Simply Sustaining Your Partnerships

By Ruth Anne Landsverk

Just like Wisconsin's Karner blue butterfly, the existence of a Partnership Action Team in some schools can become endangered or even extinct without a supportive "habitat." A survey of over 100 Connecticut schools found that Action Teams in one-third of the schools disappeared eight years after starting. The major culprit? Changes in school leadership.

The National Network of Partnership Schools identified a well-organized Action Team as critical to sustaining a high-quality partnership program in schools. Here are some things departing VISTAs can do to keep the school's current principal informed and supportive of the Action Team, as well as lay the groundwork to help incoming VISTAs sustain partnerships, no matter who becomes school principal.

1. Leave your principal with a written summary of how Action Team decisions and activities connected to and helped advance school improvement goals. Did your Family Read-In tie in to helping 4th graders turn in more book reports? Did the interactive math homework help 2nd graders get faster at addition facts? Any numbers or positive testimony you collected from teachers and parents will be valuable fuel for your principal to keep school partnerships alive and well at the district level.

2. For the new VISTA, leave a "how-to" of your Action Team's accomplishments. What did you do this year? How did you do it? Who were the key people involved in making it happen? What programs or businesses funded activities? Your experiences, thoughts, and any data you collected will be liquid gold to new VISTAs and/or other partnership advocates seeking to continue a good thing.

3. Display your district's Family Involvement Policy in a prominent place. This policy serves as a reminder that partnerships are not only beneficial to invest time and effort in, but are a board-authorized way of "doing business" with the people who schools exist for: children and their families. If your district doesn't have a policy, display your Action Team's answer to the question, "What do we believe and value about engaging parents in children's learning?"

4. Nail down dates and times with your principal for school staff to start 2009-10 with in-service training on partnerships and effective practices. In what areas did staff need more help with learning how to work with families? What goals or needs did teachers and parents on the Action Team identify to address next year? What impact do changes in school demographics have on partnerships? Leave time for teachers to share with each other successful ideas for working with families.

5. Disseminate meeting times, dates, and locations to Action Team members (including the principal) for 2009-10. Fill vacancies for the coming school year. Make sure members have each others' phone numbers and e-mail addresses to keep the lines of communication open during the summer. Sketch out a tentative agenda for the first meeting of the new school year, as well as a plan to get new members up to speed on the goals and history of your Action Team.

Some planning ahead and communicating on your part will make the incoming VISTA's transition much smoother. It will also help your school leader keep partnerships front and center in the minds of teachers and families, and continue the good work of your Action Team.

May your summer of 2009 be filled with happy memories!

Save the Dates!



**July 10- VISTA
Retreat, Oxford**

**July 15- Quarterly
Reports due**

**July 17- last day of
service for July
2008-start VISTAs**

**August 3- VISTA
close of service
webinar**

Kim answers Robyn's questions

Kim is serving at Parents Plus and Kosciusko Montessori School in Milwaukee.



Robyn: If you could vacation anywhere in the world with cost not being an issue where would it be?

Kim: That would be the best thing in the world if that was possible. I would backpack through Europe and go to as many countries as possible. If Europe didn't work out, I would want to go to Puerto Rico and work on my Spanish.

Robyn: If reincarnation is real, what would you like to come back as?

Kim: I think it would be cool to be a little monkey living in the rainforest. I could go for a life of just hanging out somewhere beautiful and swinging from tree branches.

Robyn: What do you see yourself doing in ten years?

Kim: I don't know where I see myself in two months let alone ten years!

Ideally, I would have a job that I love (teaching or a child life specialist), married, and I would be traveling to different countries whenever possible.

Robyn: What is your favorite cartoon?

Kim: I don't really watch cartoons much anymore, but I would say Doug on Nickelodeon will always be a favorite of mine.

Robyn: Who do you think should have the number one spot on the hunk list?

Kim: This is a tough question. I have always been a sucker for Matthew McConaughey, so I am going to have to say he would be number one.

Robyn: What do you like best about Wisconsin and was it a huge change from Ohio?

Kim: I would say the best part about Milwaukee is that it is right on Lake Michigan. I love living just a walk away from the beach and being able to enjoy the beauty of a lake. No, Wisconsin was not a huge change at all. There is a bunch of countryside just like Ohio and the people still have that Midwestern friendliness that I love.

Robyn: If you could be a super hero, what would be your name and what powers would you have?

Kim: This is going to sound corny, but my super power would be to be able to make a person feel happy when they need it. I still need to think of a super hero name though; I'm open to suggestions.



Robyn: Which do you think should come first dinner or dessert?

Kim: Well it's always nice to finish a meal with something sweet, but I usually can't wait to eat my dessert last.

Robyn: What do you think was the most important thing you learned being a VISTA?

Kim: I learned to be comfortable putting myself out there. This is something that you have to do a lot as a VISTA whether it is meeting people at your school, trying to get parents and staff involved, soliciting for donations, or creating partnerships. As a VISTA you have to be comfortable making the first move and knowing that you may be rejected, but that it is okay. Also, the more open you are, the more people will be inclined to be open with you and help you.

Robyn: Are you a country girl or a city girl now that you've lived in both?

Kim: I think I will always be a little bit of both. My love for being outside and for animals came from growing up in the country. I like living in the city and being around so many diverse cultures, but I don't know if I can ever consider myself a "city girl." I don't think I have the fashion sense for that.

Robyn: Are you going to stay in Wisconsin, go back home, or go to another state all together?

Kim: That is something that I will hopefully know in the next month. My choices are to stay in Milwaukee, move to Chicago, or go to grad school in Texas. It is definitely up in the air right now.

Robyn: Why were you in Honduras and what was the most important thing you learned there?

Kim: I was in Honduras last summer volunteering through an organization called Central American Medical Outreach (CAMO). I was able to work at a daycare in the morning, taught English in the afternoon, and took Spanish lessons at night, so it was a full day to say the least. I learned so much from being in Honduras, but I would say the most important thing is how much we take things for granted here in the States.

Robyn answers Kim's questions

Robyn is serving at Parents Plus and U.S. Grant Elementary School in Milwaukee.



Kim: Just to refresh everyone's memory, why did you choose to do VISTA?

Robyn: I felt I needed to make a difference. I also believe that I needed to connect families, school, and the community. It takes all of us to make a difference.

Kim: Name the most rewarding event you have helped plan at your school. Why do you think this event was the most rewarding?

Robyn: The Community Partnership Event was the most rewarding because we reach so many people with so many different needs.

Kim: You are the best at finding all of the deals; can you give everyone three ways they can save money?

Robyn: Everything eventually goes on sale. Don't be afraid to ask and shop smart. Coupons, coupons, coupons!

Kim: If you were forced to have a week off of work and DPI paid for



your whole vacation to go anywhere in the world, where would you go and who would you take with you?

Robyn: I would go to Disney World with my three kids.

Kim: You always say your kids are up for sale, but we know that they are your world. What is your favorite thing to do with your children?

Robyn: I don't have one favorite thing. Everything I do with my kids I enjoy.

Kim: The really unique part about you being a VISTA at Grant is that two of your kids go there. What is the best part about working at your kids' school? What is the most challenging?

Robyn: The best part is the other families know that I am emotionally invested in what happens. It is just not a job for me. The most challenging thing is that when my son is naughty they want to bring him to me at times. I then have to tell them, "No," because if I was not here

they wouldn't be able to bring him to me.

Kim: At Parent's Plus, we know that you have quite the sweet tooth, what are your two favorite sweets?

Robyn: Chocolate and chocolate.

Kim: This is your second school year coming up, so what are two things you are looking forward to about this year?

Robyn: Our Annual Community Partnership Event and some great new programs like kids banking accounts for our first through eighth graders at one of the local banks.

Kim: What would you like to do after you finish VISTA?

Robyn: I have no idea! I so strongly believe in what I'm doing that I can't imagine what I will do!

Kim: Describe yourself in 3 words.

Robyn: Mom & Cancer FREE!

Note: Robyn would like to invite everyone to join her team on September 27, 2009 in Milwaukee for the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure®. There are four different ways you can participate:

- 1. Join the team and walk the one mile*
- 2. Join the team and walk/run the 5K*
- 3. Join the team and Sleep in for the Cure®*
- 4. Sponsor Robyn with cash!*

*Visit www.komenmilwaukee.org
Robyn's team name is Putting Our Best Breast Forward.*



VISTA Alum Alert

Matt Dolezal, VISTA with the **Appleton Area School District**, will be finishing up his service on July 19, 2009. Matt has contributed his time and talents to **Franklin Elementary School** and the Appleton school district's **Special Education Department** for the past year. In addition, Matt has helped transition the VISTA Project into 21st century by filming and producing our first **DPI VISTA Project DVD**, a tool we will use to recruit members, sites, and promote the good work our VISTAs are doing across Wisconsin.

Matt's skills and talents as a storyteller and artist have been invaluable and we are grateful for the contribution he has made to our program.

We wish Matt all the best in his "Life After VISTA!"

"Hey, that's a good idea!" Corner



Renee Hinn recently organized a successful Summer Safety Night at Lincoln Elementary. This night provided resources from police and fire departments that families could use at home over the summer months. **LEARNING AT HOME**

Kelly Karls has recruited volunteers (including parents) from local high schools and colleges to help with the Howe Neighborhood Resource Center's SuperSummer Camp. Before Camp kicks off, all volunteers will be trained. **VOLUNTEERING**

Kim Yoder, serving at Kosciusko Montessori in Milwaukee, invited a local bank to set up a booth during the school's family movie night to help parents set up accounts. The bank also donated popcorn and brought along a mascot!

COLLABORATING

Penny Bruskin invited a Milwaukee Public Library staff member to present on skills of early literacy and reading at home while leading a story time event for families.

PARENTING

Stephanie Jung, VISTA at BEAM, is working with Milwaukee Urban Gardens and the City of Milwaukee to obtain a permit to use the lot across the street for a school garden, which will become one of the activities for students to participate in during summer school.

COLLABORATING

Dustin Young, Dane County Transition High School VISTA, recruited a former student very willing to volunteer to do as much as possible to assist the school as it moves forward and to be a member of the Action Team. Reach out to those alums- they are a great asset!

VOLUNTEERING

Go Bananas: An Unusual VISTA Asset

By Betsy Prueter

I ran across this "public service announcement" recently and I thought with the busy lives of VISTAs and the work that you all do- it might do some good to "go bananas"! It's summer and, as you're winding down from a year of busy partnership activities, you're also gearing up for summer programs. Read below for some interesting research from the City College of New York.



Research has proven that just two bananas provide enough energy for a strenuous 90-minute workout. No wonder the banana is the number one fruit with the world's leading

athletes. But energy isn't the only way a banana can help us keep fit. It can also help overcome or prevent a substantial number of illnesses and conditions, making it a must to add to our daily diet.

Depression: According to a recent survey amongst people suffering from depression, many felt much better after eating a banana. This is because bananas contain tryptophan, a type of protein that the body converts into serotonin, known to make you relax, improve your mood and generally make you feel happier.

Brain Power: 200 students at a Twickenham (Middlesex) school (England) were helped through their exams this year by eating bananas at breakfast, break, and lunch in a bid to boost their brain power. Research has shown that the potassium-packed fruit can assist learning by making pupils more alert.

Heartburn: Bananas have a natural antacid effect in the body, so if you suffer from heartburn, try eating a banana for soothing relief.

Morning Sickness: Snacking on bananas between meals helps to keep blood sugar levels up and avoid morning sickness.

Stress: Potassium is a vital mineral, which helps normalize the heartbeat, sends oxygen to the brain and regulates your body's water balance. When we are stressed, our metabolic rate rises, thereby reducing our potassium levels. These can be rebalanced with the help of a high-potassium banana snack.

Reflecting during the Retreat

By Casey Gauthier

I came across this blog post, titled 3 Benefits of Active Reflection on foreverchange.net, “a quirky DIY guide to change and personal growth.” The writer identifies herself as Leanne and I thought this would be great to read prior to attending the retreat and participating in the reflection activities that are planned. If you are unable to attend the retreat, this article may help you do some reflecting on your own.

I think everyone can relate to how quickly the days seem to pass us by. Before we know it we are another year older, and left wondering **what have I been doing all year?**

Perspective

On a personal level, reflecting on my experiences during the week, or even the day can put my life into perspective. Sometimes I may feel like I have had a bad day. However, upon reflection, I can see how my actions in a situation affected the outcome, and how if that situation were to occur again, I could handle it in a different way. If with further reflection I discover that there is nothing I could have done to alter a situation, I can be satisfied in knowing that I did my best and not let the situation eat away at me.

Find a Spark of Light

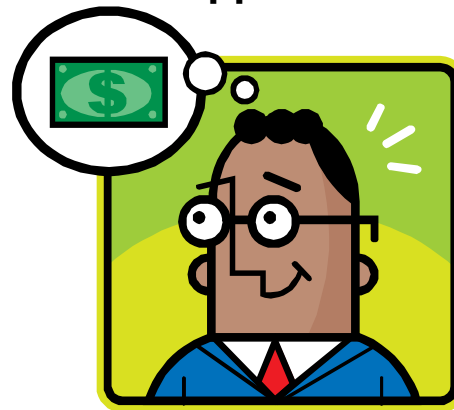
Reflection has an amazing ability to find a spark of light in what can sometimes feel like one of the worst or most irritating days/weeks of your life. While we are most likely to think

about the bad things that happened during the day/week, it is important to reflect on at least one good thing that happened. If you look hard enough you can find at least one and in fact I often find many. You will be surprised at how these little things you reflect upon can change your whole outlook on how your day or week was.

Recognize Achievements

One of the best benefits of reflection for me though is taking some “time out” to have a look at what I have done or achieved in the day or week. It is very easy to get caught up in your day to day activities and not realize just how much you have accomplished. A great way to lift yourself up is to give yourself a pat on the back for each and every achievement no matter how small.

Grant Opportunities



LEGO: Grants for Early Childhood Education and Development

The LEGO Children's Fund will provide grants for collaborative programs, either in part or in total, to organizations that focus on early childhood education and development; technology and communication projects that

advance learning opportunities; or sport or athletic programs that concentrate on underserved youth. Maximum award: \$5,000. Eligibility: 501(c)3 organizations.

Deadline: August 1, 2009.

<http://www.legochildrensfund.org/Guidelines.html>

Open Meadows Foundation: Grants for Women and Girls

Open Meadows Foundation is a grant-making organization for projects that are led by and benefit women and girls. It funds projects that reflect the diversity of the community served by the project in both its leadership and organization; promote building community power; promote racial, social, economic and environmental justice; have limited financial access or have encountered obstacles in their search for funding. Maximum award: \$2,000. Eligibility: 501(c)3 organizations with an organizational budget no larger than \$150,000. Projects must be designed and implemented by women and girls.

Deadline: August 15, 2009.

<http://www.openmeadows.org/>

National Association of Independent Schools: Challenge 20/20 Program

Challenge 20/20 is an Internet-based program that pairs classes at any grade level (K-12) from schools in the U.S. with their counterpart classes in schools in other countries; together the teams (of two or three schools) tackle real global problems to find solutions that can be implemented at the local level and in their own communities. Maximum

award: global student exchange.

Eligibility: elementary and secondary schools, public or private, located anywhere in the world.

Deadline: August 17, 2009.

<http://www.nais.org/conferences/index.cfm?ItemNumber=147262&sn.ItemNumber=148035>

By Kids for Kids/NYSE Foundation/K12: NYSE Financial Future Challenge

The NYSE Financial Future Challenge asks kids to come up with new ways to teach their peers about finance, money management, and investing in the stock market. Entries may include games, books, websites, videos, and other media that would help illuminate the fundamentals of the stock market, enhance financial literacy, and make it easy for young people to learn and even participate in the markets. Maximum award: \$2,500 to invest in stocks, as well as special media attention at the NYSE. Eligibility: youth between the ages of 6 and 19 who reside in the United States, District of Columbia and U.S. territories and possessions.

Deadline: August 31, 2009.

<http://www.bkfk.com/>

The Student Conservation Association: Green Your School Contest

The Student Conservation Association's Green Your School Contest stimulates and/or identifies conservation service projects designed by high school students that improve, restore, beautify, or conserve their high school environment. Entries will be judged

according to the following criteria: the project has or will improve the environmental health of the school; the project is sustainable; the project is initiated by students and engages other students, teachers, and school administrators; the submission itself is of high quality; and the project engaged the community. Maximum award: \$5,000. Eligibility: projects must have been begun after August 1, 2008 and be student-designed.

Deadline: October 9, 2009.

<http://www.thesca.org/green-your-school>

Project Learning Tree:

GreenWorks! Grants

Project Learning Tree (PLT) GreenWorks! grants engage PLT educators and their students with their community via "learning-by-doing" environmental projects that involve student leadership, service-learning, and community participation. Maximum award: \$5,000. Eligibility: Educators who have received PLT training. Project must be youth-planned and -executed, and integrate student learning and community service. It also must include at least one community partner, such as a local organization or business, and must acquire 50 percent matching funds.

Deadline: October 31, 2009.

http://www.plt.org/cms/pages/21_22_21.html

Wild Ones: Lorrie Otto Seeds for Education Grants

The Lorrie Otto Seeds for Education Grant Program gives small monetary grants to schools, nature centers, or

other non-profit educational organizations for the purpose of establishing outdoor learning centers. Funds will be provided only for the purchase of native plants and seed. Maximum award: varies. Eligibility: schools, nature centers, and other non-profit and not-for-profit places of learning, including houses of worship with a site available for this stewardship project.

Deadline: November 15, 2009.

<http://www.for-wild.org/seedmony.htm>

Character Education Partnership: National Schools of Character

The National Schools of Character Awards identify exemplary schools and districts to serve as models for others, and helps schools and districts improve their efforts in effective character education. Maximum award: \$2,000. Eligibility: To be eligible, a school must have been engaged in character education for a minimum of three full years, starting no later than December 2006 for the 2010 awards. Districts need to have been engaged in character education for a minimum of four full years, starting no later than December 2005. Smaller administrative units that maintain a separate identity within a large district may apply in the district category, e.g., a school pyramid or cluster.

Deadline: December 1, 2009.

<http://www.character.org/nsocapplicationprocess>